



## Populus Tremuloides! Fall Colors in Idaho

Sara Focht, Wildlife Educator, MK Nature Center

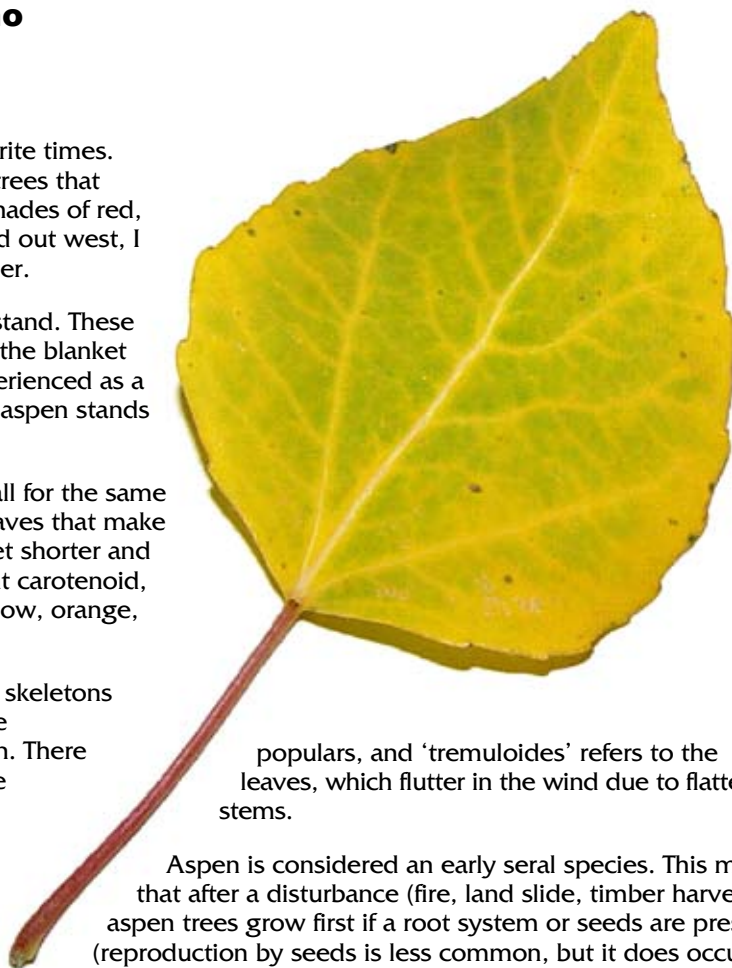
As a kid, growing up in the Midwest, fall was one of my favorite times. The humidity of summer faded away. Lush green hardwood trees that lined the small town I grew up in faded into bold, beautiful shades of red, maroon, pumpkin orange, and vibrant yellow. When I moved out west, I missed this rainbow of colors that escorted summer into winter.

In Idaho, one place to find beautiful fall colors is in an aspen stand. These native deciduous trees turn predictably yellow every fall, but the blanket of this gold against the blue fall sky is something I never experienced as a child. Aspens captivated me and I found myself seeking out aspen stands to learn more about these amazing trees.

Aspen trees turn yellow, orange, and sometimes red in the fall for the same reason all other deciduous trees turn. The pigment in their leaves that make them green (chlorophyll,) starts to break down as the days get shorter and the temperature drops. This process exposes the ever-present carotenoid, xanthophyll, and anthocyanin pigments turning the leaves yellow, orange, and sometimes red.

After aspen trees have lost their leaves, they appear as white skeletons against even whiter snow. However, their bark contains some chlorophyll, that same pigment that made their leaves green. There is just enough chlorophyll in the bark to continue to do a little photosynthesizing over the winter!

If you are standing in the middle of an aspen stand, you are probably actually standing in the middle of only one or two plants. Aspen trees in a grove are simply shoots of the same underground root system. The individual trees you see are clones. For this reason, in the fall, when you see a whole group of aspen trees turning yellow at approximately the same time...you are probably seeing the whole clone. The species of aspen we have in Idaho earns its scientific name, *Populus tremuloides*, from its relatives and its unique leaf stems. 'Populus' indicates its relatives—the



populus, and 'tremuloides' refers to the leaves, which flutter in the wind due to flattened stems.

Aspen is considered an early seral species. This means that after a disturbance (fire, land slide, timber harvest) aspen trees grow first if a root system or seeds are present (reproduction by seeds is less common, but it does occur). Conifer trees take longer to establish, but will eventually intrude on an aspen stand. You can see different stages of this succession out in the forests of Idaho. Some aspen stands are very pure, and others have small conifers growing under the aspen canopy. Still others are infested with conifers and finally, you may be in a conifer forest and see a few aspen here and there.

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## FEATURES

### 1 Aspens

Sara Focht, Wildlife Educator,  
MK Nature Center

Interesting facts about Idaho's colorful native!

### 2 Changes at your bird feeder

Vicky Runnoe, Conservation  
Education Supervisor, IDFG

### 3 Falconry demonstrations

Watch falcons and their handlers demonstrate this amazing partnership at the World Center for Birds of Prey.

In the Palouse region of Idaho, a similar cycle occurs between aspen and Douglas hawthorn, rather than conifers. The aspen dominate until disturbance creates an opening where the hawthorn can thrive.

So, aspen stands actually need fire or other disturbance to perpetuate. Without disturbance, aspen stands slowly become conifer stands. In Idaho and throughout the Intermountain West, the amount of aspen covering our landscape has greatly diminished due to fire suppression efforts. Prescribed fire has been successfully used to regenerate aspen stands and help wildlife that depend on them. After a fire, small “suckers” sprout up everywhere, replenishing the aspen forest.

Aspen communities are important to many wildlife species that we love. Deer, elk, sapsuckers and other birds, beaver, small mammals...over 500 plant and animals are associated with aspen trees!

Where aspen forests are more common, such as the eastern US, the wood is used for teddy bear stuffing, match sticks, tongue depressors, fine paper, and particle board. In the western US, aspen has little commercial use, but one of its best-loved traits is that it laces the hills with gold each fall.



*Five members of the Henry's Fork Chapter of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program have become the first Certified Master Naturalists in Idaho! The other members of the chapter are close behind and are still finishing up their required 40 hours of training and 40 hours of conservation service. For more information on the Idaho Master Naturalist Program, contact Sara Focht at (208) 921-6933 or at [sfocht@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:sfocht@idfg.idaho.gov)*

## Idaho Department of Fish and Game's Conservation Services

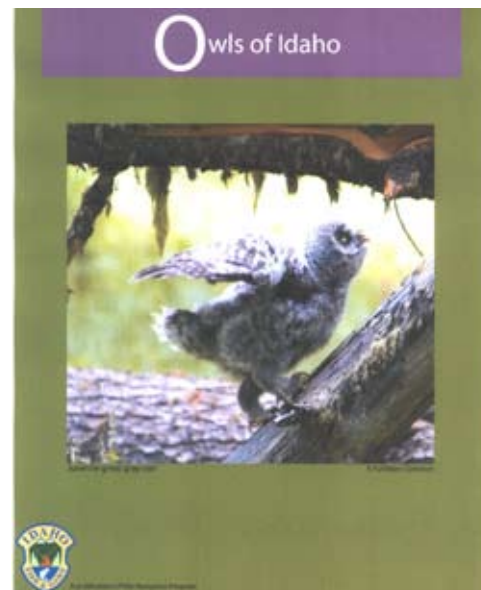
What do Slickspot Peppergrass, the Boreal Owl, the Spotted Bat, the Seven Devil's Mountain Snail, and the Pygmy Rabbit have in common? All these species fall under the stewardship of the new Conservation Services Section (CSS) of Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

Recently, the Nongame Wildlife Program and components of the Idaho Conservation Data Center merged to form this new and exciting program whose employees work to conserve all species in Idaho that are not hunted or fished; when you include plants, these species represent more than 95% of all animals and plants in the state.

Dr. Rex Sallabanks (formerly the Nongame Bird Program Leader) was recently selected as the new Manager of the CSS and will be coordinating staff to carry out surveys, inventories, data management, watchable wildlife, and research activities for Idaho's nongame wildlife and plants. Although responsible for all nongame species, the CSS will emphasize work to benefit Idaho's at-risk species, focusing on those classified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the state's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy

Funding for nongame species comes from the Idaho State nongame tax check-off, the sale of Idaho wildlife license plates, the State Wildlife Grant Program, and from federal agency conservation partners. No general fund tax dollars and no hunting and fishing license money are appropriated to these species.

You will be hearing more about the CSS and projects around the state in Windows to Wildlife issues to come.



Halloween is near and besides black cats and spiders, owls are icons of this fall holiday. You can learn more about Idaho's 14 species of owls in the new online publication, Owls of Idaho. As you peruse the leaflet, you will see vivid photos of all the owls and learn where they live and what they do for food and shelter. Find the leaflet at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/nongame/publications/owls.pdf>.



# Times, They are a'Changin'

Vicky Runnoe, Conservation Education Supervisor, Idaho Department of Fish and Game

The approach of fall is a wonderful time full of changes and hints of what is to come. For those of us that have bird feeders, the autumnal changing of the guard at our feeders begins before summer's end, allowing for an up-close view of the progress of songbird migration.

Hints of the impending peregrinations of birds are given by the hummingbirds. In late July, most visitors to hummingbird feeders are now juvenile birds, their parents having departed before them. While not quite as pugnacious as their parents, these tiny creatures also readily defend a feeder, chasing other young hummingbirds away. As September advances, so does the number of hummingbirds diminish until they are largely gone by month's end.

While the bombast of hummingbirds demands our attention, other visitors subtly arrive with mild cold fronts. One morning, no white-crowned sparrows and the next they have arrived. Scratching under feeders and nearby shrubbery, the white-crowns move about in small groups. Young birds with their tan-striped crowns jump away from the more dominant adults. In much of Idaho the white-crowns appear in spring and fall as migration brings them back and forth across the state. Only in southern Idaho will these large sparrows stay at feeders all winter.

Song sparrows also begin to be seen at some feeders in the fall. Generally, solitary, these lovely rusty-brown sparrows with the streaky breast maintain a territory year-round. If a feeder is within the territory, the resident song sparrow will not be shy about becoming a regular visitor

The autumn arrival of spotted towhees is often seen before heard. First is the persistent sound of scratching and rustling coming from the underbrush. Then a glimpse of dry leaves tossed out in the open. And finally, the bird itself attired in autumnal orange and brown set off by black and white. Towhees generally appear alone, and not for long as migration beckons them southward. October also brings the return of the dark-eyed juncos, a favorite feeder visitor. With a flourish of their white outer tail feathers, they bustle about on the ground in search of small seeds. Their somber gray belies their scrappy

nature as they hop about, more dominant flock members chasing lower-ranking members away from a coveted food source.

Fall can bring surprises to backyard feeders. Depending upon food availability, some of Idaho's birds may become elevational migrants, moving from mountain slopes into valleys should food become scarce. Mountain chickadees and red-breasted nuthatches are two such species that can surprise feederwatchers in the fall. Both species will frequently form loose flocks with resident black-capped chickadees moving around a winter territory and visiting feeders within that area.

By November, most migrants have settled in for the Idaho winter. To insure that your winter visitors continue to visit your yard, offer a variety of foods in a variety of feeder types. Offer water in a heated bird bath that will keep the water ice-free. And make sure that your yard provides abundant shelter from predators and winter weather. Then sit back and enjoy. Before you know it, they will be leaving and another annual feathered changing of the guard will begin.



Dave Herr, USFS

Spotted Towhee



Donna Dewhurst, USFWS

Black-capped Chickadee

Red-breasted Nuthatch



Dave Herr, USFS

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# Fall *Wildlife Events*

## CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

A NOCTURNAL CELEBRATION AT THE MK NATURE CENTER

Friday and Saturday, October 24th & 25th, 6:30-8:30pm

As the sun sets, out come the creatures of the night! Bring the whole family in costume to the MK Nature Center for our fourth annual Creatures of the Night Halloween event. This family friendly educational event will be held on October 24th & 25th from 6:30 to 8:30pm. Bring a sense of adventure for a night walk to learn all about nocturnal critters like beavers, owls, spiders, wolves, and crayfish. Create your own mask and enjoy fireside story telling.

Purchase tickets in advance at the MK Nature Center after October 15th. Tickets are \$3/person (kids age 2 and under are free). A limited number of tickets (400/night) will be sold to maintain the quality of the event. The MK Nature Center is located behind Fish and Game Headquarters at 600 S. Walnut in Boise. Call 334-2225 for more information.



*Cristina Watson (right), a wildlife educator at MK Nature Center, shows a young visitor the beauty of black widow spiders. Black widows are just one of many animals featured at Creatures of the Night. Photo Courtesy, MK Nature Center.*

## FALCONS AND HAWKS TO DEMONSTRATE FLYING SKILLS IN OCTOBER

Live falcons and hawks will demonstrate their remarkable flying skills outdoors each weekend in October at The Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey, 5668 Flying Hawk Lane.

Experts from the Velma Morrison Interpretive Center will use traditional falconry techniques to present the flight demonstrations at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. (weather permitting) on Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 4-5, Oct. 11-12, Oct. 18-19 and Oct. 25-26.

Visitors also can tour the Archives of Falconry daily at 11:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. The archive features the new Arab Heritage Wing with authentic hunting tent and interactive displays, as well as art, sculpture, artifacts and extensive library.

Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Admission: \$5 adults, \$4 seniors, \$3 for youths ages 4-16. Admission is free to members.

Information: 362-8687

Driving directions: From I-84, take the Cole Road exit and continue south for 6 miles on Cole Road and Flying Hawk Lane.

[http://www.peregrinefund.org/frequent\\_flyer.asp](http://www.peregrinefund.org/frequent_flyer.asp)

*This falcon (right) is one of several birds that will be flying at the faconry events. Other birds at the event include gryfalcons, peregrine falcons, American kestrels, and Swainson's hawks. All the birds are trained with traditional falconry techniques and equipment. Photo courtesy, World Center for Birds of Prey.*



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